Poetry written in prose or prose written like poetry? Higuchi Ichiyō's narrative strategies reconsidered

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1. Introduction

Higuchi Ichiyō 樋口一葉 (born Natsu なつ, 夏 or Natsuko 夏子, 1872–1896) is commonly regarded as the first professional woman writer of Meiji Japan. As a writer, she was very conscious early on in her career of both what she wrote and how she wrote.[1] Above all, her "Diaries" (*Ichiyō nikki* 一葉日記, 1912) testify to her great self-awareness as a writer. She often comments on her own style and literary achievements while attempting to define the essence and significance of literature at the same time. She also explores what might be compared to the Horatian *non omnis moriar* ("I shall not wholly die", *Odes* 3.30), sometimes by using *waka* poetry: "If there is someone reading these words once this tree is already withered, [let this poem help him understand how I feel]: let it grow, though finally it will fade away, this lonely tree".[2] The desire to create something memorable, juxtaposed with transient, insignificant works written easily and readily forgotten, is recurrent in the "Diaries":

> I do not want to follow the path of many writers and create works that are read only once and then easily disposed of. Even if the feeling and values of this world we live in are subject to constant change,

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1 Comp.: Shioda Ryōhei, *Higuchi Ichiyō*, Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1960: 62–73.

2 かれ木の後に見る人あらばとて、なほしげれくらくなるとも一木立. *Zenshaku Ichiyō nikki*, vol. 1, ed. Nishio Yoshihito, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1976: 65.

> and what brings joy today will be thrown away tomorrow, I want to write literature that speaks to people's hearts. I want to write literature that reveals their hearts.[3]

The passage quoted above can hardly be considered a detailed artistic manifesto. However, it proves Ichiyō's belief in the universal value of literature which leads her to further questions regarding the style and form which would make her works speak to the hearts of her readers. Bearing in mind Ichiyō's artistic credo as it is articulated in the "Diaries", I would like to consider in this article the presence and the role of poetic tradition in her works of fiction. I will start by shortly examining Ichiyō's educational background focusing on her studies of the classics and *waka* composition. Then I will analyse the possible influences of poetic techniques and imagery in three of her novellas from different stages of her literary career, which should help me detect any possible changes occurring in Ichiyō's use of classical texts and techniques.

2. Higuchi Ichiyō and the world of classical literature

In the history of Japanese literature, Higuchi Ichiyō is mostly remembered for her achievements in writing fiction. Her "Growing up" (*Takekurabe* たけくらべ, 1895–1896) has not ceased to attract the attention of both critics and readers alike from the moment it was first published and well-received in *Mezamashigusa* ("Literary Awakening"), a popular literary journal with contributions by such influential figures as Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862–1922), Saitō Ryokuu 斎藤緑雨 (1868–1904) and Kōda Rohan 幸田露伴 (1867–1947).[4] It is only recently that Ichiyō's *waka* started to appeal to researchers.[5]

This tendency can hardly be said to reflect the position of poetry in Ichiyō's oeuvre. The *waka* poems occupy two volumes of the six-volume edition of "Higuchi Ichiyō collected works" (*Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū* 樋口一葉全集), as many as either the novellas or the "Diaries". Moreover,

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[3] *Zenshaku Ichiyō nikki*, vol. 1, ed. Nishio Yoshihito, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1976: 212.

[4] Okazaki Yoshie, *Japanese literature in the Meiji era*, transl. V. H. Viglielmo, Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 1955: 217.

[5] See: Kawano Satoko, *Ichiyō no waka no ichi — Kadan*, 26.5, 2012: 86–91.

chronologically speaking, poetry was also the first mode of Ichiyō's creative expression. The "Diaries", whose first chapter: *Mi no furu-goromo. Maki no ichi* 身のふる衣 まきの一 ("Threadbare kimono. Book one") is devoted to Ichiyō's encounters and achievements in Haginoya or Bushclover Academy, testify to the young girl's zeal towards poetry.[6] The title Ichiyō chose for the first volume also suggests that she intended to continue focusing on her experiences as a poetry student and writer.

Young Higuchi Natsu was introduced to Haginoya after she stopped attending public school due to her mother's strong conviction that too much learning was a harmful thing for a woman. Supported by her father, Natsu continued nonetheless to study poetry and calligraphy under the guidance of Nakajima Utako 中島歌子 (1844–1903), who ran the academy for young girls in Koishikawa, Tokyo. Nakajima was at the time a well-known *waka* writer and teacher, and she belonged to the traditional Keien school (*Keien ha* 桂園派) which used techniques and images from Japanese canonical *waka* texts such as the "Collected Japanese poems of ancient and modern times" (*Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集, 920). As Ichiyō was a very devoted student, her knowledge of the classics became deeper and impressively versatile. What she first learnt in Haginoya and then during her frequent visits in the Ueno library formed a solid basis which later allowed the author of *Takekurabe* to give lectures on the canonical texts of old Japanese literature.

3. Mosaic of references

It is commonly known that Ichiyō was first inspired to write fiction by Miyake Kaho 三宅花圃 (1869–1943) her colleague from Haginoya, who published in 1888 a story (*Yabu no uguisu* 藪の鶯) and was well-rewarded for the effort.[7] The shift from poetry to prose is also detectable in the "Diaries" which focus on Ichiyō's encounter with her mentor Nakarai Tōsui 半井桃水 (1861–1926) and on her daily attempts to write novellas worth being published and remembered. Ichiyō's decision to

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[6] See: *Zenshaku Ichiyō nikki*, vol. 1, ed. Nishio Yoshihito, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1976: 17–22.

[7] Comp. Takitō Mitsuyoshi, *Ichiyō bungaku seisei to tenkai*, Tōkyō: Meiji Shoin, 1998: 1–35.

write fiction, however, did not mean that she stopped composing poetry. On the contrary, she also started to resort to poetic devices and imagery in her narratives. Her growing knowledge of the classical texts encouraged her to compare herself with previous writers.[8] She often emphasises her inability to reach the standards set by the classical poets, however readers cannot but notice the discrepancy between what she claims and her skilfulness in using stylistic devices to present her claim. She claims that her style is far from flowery or not polished enough, but at the same time she uses the language and imagery evocative of the poetics of Heian literature.[9]

In her reluctance to openly admit her conscious use of poetic allusions and stylistic devices Ichiyō resembles the protagonist of one of her earlier stories, *Yuki no hi* 雪の日 ("Snowy day", 1893). The very opening of the novella, which is believed to have been inspired by Ichiyō's relationship with her mentor Nakarai Tōsui,[10] may exemplify the tension between the style and the content. The narrative begins with a reference to poems using the image of the falling snow:

> A day like this inspires poetry and song. How I envy those who see the snow spread out before them and fashion their metaphors. Silver sprinkles the earth. Softly, snowflakes fall like dancing butterflies; wings flatter but there is no sound. Six-petaled crystals come to rest on withered tree's, spring's first flowering.[11]

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8 See: *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 3.2, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 769–777.

9 *Zenshaku Ichiyō nikki*, vol. 1, ed. Nishio Yoshihito, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1976: 46.

10 The work is frequently read in the context of Ichiyō's "Diaries" (27th February 1893) which testifies to Ichiyō's sadness after parting with Nakarai Tōsui. See: *Zenshaku Ichiyō nikki*, vol. 1, ed. Nishio Yoshihito, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1976: 342.

11 見渡すかぎり地は銀沙を敷きて、舞ふや蝴蝶の羽そで軽く、枯木も春の六花の眺めを世にある人は歌にも詠み詩にも作り、月花に並べて稱ゆらん浦山しさよ. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 256. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 174.

There is a noticeable contradiction between what the quote declares and how it works within the narrative. The speaker – a woman recalling her private love story – emphasises that she envies all those who use poetic phrasings and imagery. It may be inferred from the opening passage that one of the prominent envied poets of yore is Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (872–945), the compiler of the "Collected Japanese poems of ancient and modern times", and the writer of "Tosa diary" (*Tosa nikki* 土佐日記), since there is a reference to his poem detectable in the passage. The expression "the view of the six-petaled flowers of spring" (*haru no rokka no nagame* 春の六花の眺め) evokes the famous image created by Tsurayuki in the winter poem included in *Kokin wakashū*: "it snows, and flowers unknown to spring blossom on the trees and grass, still sleeping through the winter".[12] The speaker thus uses the poetic references to create her own phrase reverberating with lyrical beauty.

The initial juxtaposition between the narrator and the canonical poets is further developed in the novella. The speaker emphasises that contrary to the critically acclaimed authors who were capable of creating brilliant metaphors rendering the essence of winter, she herself remains speechless at its beauty and can only associate it with pain. She admits in a self-reproachful manner: "for me, the snow invites fresh pain, summoning as it falls and falls a past beyond forgetting. Eight thousand regrets I have – what little good they do me".[13] However, the way she speaks undoubtedly reveals her gift for poetic expressions. The phrase "eight thousand regrets" (*kui no yachitabi* 悔の八千度) echoes Fujiwara Tadafusa's 藤原忠房 (?–928) expression used in a poem also included in *Kokin wakashū*: "the sadness I feel with eight thousand regrets not to

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[12] 雪降れば冬ごもりせる草も木も 春に知られぬ花ぞ咲きける. *Kokin wakashū*, 323 — *Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 5, ed. Ozawa Masao / Matsuda Shigeho, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1994: 140.

[13] あはれ忘れがたき昔しを思へば、降りに降る雪くちをしく悲しく、悔の八千度その甲斐もなけれど. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 256. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly. *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 174.

have gone before you the water goes on and will never return".[14] Thus, the references to the Heian period poet neatly interwoven in the narration are used to create the atmosphere of anguish and bitterness. Tadafusa's mournful verse corresponds with the narrator's experience which is only gradually revealed to the readers.

The intricate mosaic of poetic allusions Ichiyō created in *Yuki no hi* is completed by the final reference to Murasaki Shikibu's 紫式部 (978–1016) poem from the "New collection of poems ancient and modern" (*Shin kokin wakashū* 新古今和歌集):

> Indeed, there is truth to Murasaki's poem "the first snow falls on a world of rising sorrows." Again this year it comes, oblivious to all the sadness it brings, so proud of itself for decorating, even for a moment, a broken, ruined fence. There was a time when I loved it, the first snow, but I was younger then.[15]

The narrator wittingly uses a set of contrastive images inspired by Murasaki Shikibu's poem: snow and ruins, innocence and devastating experience, calmness and sorrow. Contrary to Murasaki Shikibu, however, who can still find consolation in the snowy landscape, Ichiyō's narrator's pain and sorrow cannot be covered or alleviated by the falling snow anymore. The speaker in Murasaki's poem observes with calmness how the snow covers the ruins, even if the effect is only temporary. Ichiyō's narrator is, however, fully aware of the illusionary effect it brings, admitting that the days when she believed in innocence and longed for quiet happiness are long gone. "My regrets come too late, and my illusions have all fled"[16] – she confesses her bitter disappointment.

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[14] 先立たぬ 悔いの八千度 悲しきは 流るる水の かへり来ぬなり. *Kokin wakashū*, 837 — *Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 5, ed. Ozawa Masao / Matsuda Shigeho, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1994: 316.

[15] 思へば誠と式部が歌の、ふれば憂さのみ増さる世を、知らじな雪の今歳も又、我が破れ垣をつくろひて、見よとや誇る我れは昔の戀しきものを. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 260. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 177.

[16] 悔こそ物の終りなれ、今は浮世に何事も絶えぬ. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 260. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and*

The effect of her disillusion is beautifully refined by the use of poetic references. In this manner, *Yuki no hi* may be treated as an illustration of how poetic references are skilfully used, adapted and transformed in Ichiyō's narratives, both thematically and stylistically.

4. Classical poetry and Ichiyō's titles

One of the most apparent ways of using the classical texts is referring to them directly in titles or in protagonist's names. Such a strategy is used by Ichiyō in both her early and later works whose titles and names frequently require the reader's erudition and eagerness to play with words and references. The expression *Yamizakura* ("Cherryblossoms at dusk", 1892), for example, the title of Ichiyō's first published novella,[17] is taken from the last sentence in the text: "There was no wind in the air but the cherry blossoms fell beneath the shadows of the eaves. In the evening sky, the temple bell resounded".[18] The sentence uses the symbols of sakura blossoms and the bell temple to evoke the moment of the protagonist's death. Moreover, it echoes a *waka* by Nōin 能因 (988–1051?) included in *Shin kokin wakashū*: "Coming upon a mountain village at nightfall on a spring day, I saw blossoms scattering in the echoes of the vesper bells".[19] The famous poem strengthens the sense of impermanence of this world as symbolized by the vesper bell and Ichiyō uses the powerful image of passing to sublime the moment of Chiyo's death.

The name of the girl – Chiyo – itself is abundant in poetic allusions highlighted by the way in which it is introduced in the story: "The hopes

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writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 177.

17 The novella was published on 3 March 1892, in the first issue of *Musashino* edited by Nakarai Tōsui.

18 風もなき軒端の桜ほろ／＼とこぼれて夕やみの空鐘の音かなし. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 9. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 173.

19 山里の春の夕暮来てみれば 入相 の鐘に花ぞ散りける. *Shin kokin wakashū*, 116 — *Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 43, ed. Minemura Fumito, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1995: 53.

her parents placed in her were apparent from her name, Chiyo. It meant a thousand years, the lifespan of a crane".[20] It is worth mentioning that Ichiyō uses here a poetic name for a crane, i.e. *tazu* 田鶴, instead of the commonly used *tsuru* 鶴. Ichiyō's phrasing here is evocative of the famous congratulatory poem included in the "Collection of gleanings of Japanese poems continued" (*Shoku shūi wakashū* 続拾遺和歌集, 1276): "If you could live as long as the cranes dwelling among the reeds, your reign too might be reckoned as a thousand years".[21] Chiyo is thus introduced as a longed-for daughter, adored by everyone and brought up in a loving environment. Chiyo, who dies prematurely, is one of a number of Ichiyō's protagonists whose names are carefully chosen to render their personalities and to anticipate, be it ironically, their fate. Such use of names may be also said to resemble the Edo period *gesaku bungaku* 戯作文学 (popular literature). Ichiyō's first published work thus illustrates how she uses the titles and names of characters rooted in the classical tradition and thus evokes innumerable associations shaping the process of reading and understanding of the story.

The multilayered use of poetic references in the titles Ichiyō chooses for her narratives is further complicated in her later works. It is well illustrated by the title of *Takekurabe*, probably the most famous and widely read of Ichiyō's works of fiction. It is worth mentioning here that the word *takekurabe* was not Ichiyō's first choice. She began writing the story under another title – *Hinadori* 雛鶏 or "Baby bird". The word may be also associated with Japanese *hina* "dolls" or *hinaningyō* 雛人形 "dolls customarily displayed during the Girls' Festival". In this manner, *hinadori* may be associated with youth and childhood plays. It is most probably this pattern of association that led Ichiyō to a new title, more abundant in literary allusions. The numerous possibilities of how the title *Takekurabe* might be rendered into English, i.e. "Comparing heights",

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[20] あし田鶴の齢ながゝれとにや千代となづけし親心にぞ見みゆらんものよ. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 3.

[21] あしたづの齢しあれば君が代の千歳の数もかぞへとりてむ. *Shoku shūi wakashū*, 750 — *Waka bungaku taikei*, vol. 7, ed. Kobayashi Hizuhiko, Tōkyō: Meiji Shoin, 2002: 133. The poem is also quoted in *Murasaki Shikibu nikki — Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 26, ed. Fujioka Tadaharu, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1994: 166.

"Child's play" or "Growing up",[22] stem from the fact that the title is Ichiyō's neologism coined from two words appearing in two *waka* poems exchanged by the young protagonists in the twenty-third chapter of "The tales of Ise" (*Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語).[23]

In this well-known and frequently quoted passage of "The tales of Ise" a young boy and a girl – former playmates or *osananajimi* 幼馴染 – meet again in a place in which they used to spend time together. On the occasion, the boy addresses a poem to the girl: "By the barrel-well's / built up crib I'd pull myself / measuring height; / I've shot up like a willow / this long while we've been apart".[24] While recalling the habit of marking his height on the well, the boy emphasises the fact that he has grown up since he last saw the girl. The girl thus responds to his poem: "Since we vied for height / my once childish hair has grown / beyond my shoulders: / If it is not to be you / who then best should tie it up".[25] Not only does she further explore the motif of growing-up by means of using the image of a well casing (*izutsu* 井筒), but she also reveals her hope to

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[22] Comp.: Janet A. Walker, *The cinematic art of Higuchi Ichiyō's Takekurabe (Comparing heights, 1895–1896) — Word and image in Japanese cinema*, ed. Dennis Washburn / Carole Cavanaugh, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001: 36–58. Higuchi Ichiyō, *Child's play* (transl. Robert L. Danly) — Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 254–287. Higuchi Ichiyō, *Growing up* (transl. Edward Seidensticker) — *Modern Japanese literature*, ed. Donald Keene, New York: Grove Press, 1956: 70–110.

[23] *Ise monogatari — Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 12, ed. Katagiri Yōichi / Fukui Teisuke / Takahashi Shōji / Shimizu Yoshiko, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1994: 135–138. See also*: The tales of Ise*, transl. H. Jay Harris, Vermont / Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972: 64–67.

[24] 筒井筒井筒にかけし まろがたけ過ぎにけらしな妹見ざるまに. *Ise monogatari — Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 12, ed. Katagiri Yōichi / Fukui Teisuke / Takahashi Shōji / Shimizu Yoshiko, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1994: 135. *The tales of Ise*, transl. H. Jay Harris, Vermont / Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972: 64.

[25] くらべこし振り分け髪も肩すぎぬ君ならずしてたれかあぐべき. *Ise monogatari — Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 12, ed. Katagiri Yōichi / Fukui Teisuke / Takahashi Shōji / Shimizu Yoshiko, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1994: 136. *The tales of Ise*, transl. H. Jay Harris, Vermont / Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972: 66.

become the boy's future wife. Ichiyō refers to this exchange of poems in the title by combining *take* たけ and *kurabe* くらべ into one poetic expression to suggest the possible theme of childhood love in her narrative. However, the *kurabe* or comparing element also involves the notion of rivalry, both in the field of love and in the form of children's fights. In this manner the title introduces the theme of social divisions and anticipates the existence of two antagonistic gangs in the story.[26]

5. Poetic narration

The influence of *waka* poetry is detectable in Ichiyō's works not only in her choices of titles but also in the style of narration. *Yamizakura*, for example, opens in the fashion evocative of poetic strategies:

> Only a bamboo fence separated the two houses. They shared the same well whose waters ran deep and pure, untroubled as the concord between the neighbours. The flowering plum beneath the eaves of one home brought spring to the other. Together they enjoyed the fragrant blossom.[27]

This passage brilliantly uses the stylistic devices Ichiyō learnt and devotedly practiced while writing poetry, i.e. *engo* 縁語 "threaded words", or associative word-images, and *kakekotoba* 掛詞 "pivot words" poetically exploring the possibilities the homonymy of Japanese language creates for combining different levels of meaning. Following the associative patterns, Robert Danly distinguishes between two main semantic fields in the passage – one that is related to water (*niwai* 庭井 "garden well", *mizu* 水 "water", *soko* 底 "depths", *kiyoku* きよく "purely", *fukaku* 深く "deeply") and the other built around the image of spring

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[26] See: Yamane Kenkichi, *Higuchi Ichiyō no bungaku*, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1976: 108.

[27] 隔ては中垣の建仁寺にゆづりて汲かはす庭井の水の交はりの底きよく深く軒端に咲く梅一木に両家の春を見せて薫りも分ち合ふ中村園田と呼ぶ宿あり. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 3. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 167.

(*haru* 春 "spring", *ume* 梅 "plum", *kaori* 薫り "fragrance"). There are also expressions related to the act of dividing (*hedate* 隔て "partition, barrier", *nakagaki* 中垣 "middle fence"). The early spring thus becomes a setting for the description of Chiyo's love budding with every sentence of the narrative. *Kakekotoba* used in the final line of the passage (*kaori mo wakachiau naka* 薫りも分ち合ふ中) enables two possible readings of the component *naka* 中: either as a part of the phrase "relationship in which both shared the fragrance (of plum blossoms)" or simply as a component of *Nakamura* 中村, the name of a family living next to the Sonodas. The passage thus introduces two family names, which listed together may also function as an anticipation of the relationship between the main characters: Nakamura Chiyo and Sonoda Ryōnosuke. Moreover, the expressions of division may anticipate the barriers between the protagonists who, while being close to each other, cannot be fully together.[28]

In fact, the opening passage of *Yamizakura* may be considered an illustration of a *waka*-like or *wakatekina* narration style which is detectable especially in the early works by Ichiyō.[29] The whole narrative consists of a series of images loosely combined around the motifs of *osananajimi* "childhood playmate" and *kataomoi* "unrequited love". These motifs are frequently explored in Ichiyō's earliest works which also most vividly illustrate her attachment to the style and imagery of Heian period literature *ōchōbungaku* 王朝文学.[30] *Yamizakura* draws on a number of *hikiuta* 引歌 "quoted poems" to create a lyrical picture of childhood infatuation rooted in the poetic tradition. It uses allusions to *Ise monogatari*'s two episodes accompanied with *waka* poems: chapter 23 in which two childhood playmates who used to mark their height on the enclosure of a well (*izutsu* 井筒) are now grown up and bound to be married, and

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[28] See: Noguchi Seki, *Kochō sareta katakoi. Yamizakura kenkyū nōto — Ronshū Higuchi Ichiyō*, vol. 1, ed. Higuchi Ichiyō Kenkyūkai, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1996: 12. Noguchi claims that in both *Yamizakura* and *Takekurabe* the opening passages reveal the nature of social relationships between the characters.

[29] The term *wakateki* is effectively used by Nakamaru in his analysis of *Yuku kumo* ゆく雲 ("Passing clouds", 1895). See: Nakamaru Nobuaki, *Yuku kumo no isō. Ichiyō ni okeru wakateki kōsōryoku no mondai — Ronshū Higuchi Ichiyō*, vol. 2, ed. Higuchi Ichiyō Kenkyūkai, Tōkyō: Ōfūsha, 1998: 71–92.

[30] Comp: Yamada Yūsaku, *Ōtsugomori no engekisei — Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō*, 68.5 (*Higuchi Ichiyō kore made no soshite kore kara no*), 2003: 86.

chapter 45 in which unspoken love leads to the death of a young girl.[31] The poetically inspired structure of *Yamizakura* may in fact be reminiscent of a *waka* composition process reminding us of the practices in the Haginoya 萩の舎 school of poetry where girls were frequently asked to compose a *waka* on a given topic. In this manner, Ichiyō's narrative technique uniquely blurs the line between poetry and prose.

As Ichiyō's narratives become more complex and developed, the poetic-like composition starts to play a lesser role giving way to a more intricate plot mechanism and psychological portrayals of characters. However, even in Ichiyō's later novellas poetic references and strategies do not disappear. Most frequently it is the opening of the story which uses the technique of poetic allusion and association. The introductory passages of *Yamiyo* 暗夜 ("Encounters on a dark night", 1896) illustrate this tendency. The novella opens with a description of the place, the setting of the story:

> People often wondered just how large the compound was, surrounded by its garden wall. How long had the front gate been boarded up? Storms had had their way with the place, and what remained was disquieting. There were none of the proverbial ferns running rank among the ruins, but on the rooftop weeds now choked the tiles. Who was it who lived there mourning the past?[32]

The sense of unspoken loneliness, so often detectable in Ichiyō's other narratives, is deepened in *Yamiyo* by the use of literary references in the opening passage. The passage seems thus to echo the conversation between Tadanobu and Lady Saishō focusing on the desolated landscape which is included in *Makura no sōshi* 枕草子 ("Pillow book", 1002) by

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[31] *Ise monogatari — Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 12, ed. Katagiri Yōichi / Fukui Teisuke / Takahashi Shōji / Shimizu Yoshiko, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1994: 152–153. Comp.: Hashimoto Takeshi, *Higuchi Ichiyō sakuhin kenkyū*, Tōkyō: Izumi Shoin, 1990: 23–26.

[32] 取まはしたる邸の廣さは幾ばく坪とか聞えて、閉ぢたるまゝの大門は何年ぞやの暴風雨をさながら、今にも覆へらんさま危ふく、松はなけれど瓦に生ふる草の名の、しのぶ昔しはそも誰れとか. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 312. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 182.

Sei Shōnagon 清少納言.[33] The setting of *Yamiyo* is permeated with the disquieting atmosphere of darkness and mystery evoked by the ferns on the roof tiles and the autumn wind blowing through the ruined garden walls. There is little sign of life to be found around the house. The use of *shinobu-gusa* しのぶ草 – ferns or "weeds of remembrance" – in the opening paragraph brings associations with *Kawaranoin* 河原院 "Riverside Dwelling", a secluded place, where prince Genji and his lover were to spend intimate moments in *Yūgao* 夕顔, the fourth book of "The tale of Genji".[34]

The correspondence between *Yamiyo* and *Genji monogatari* is also openly admitted by the narrator in Ichiyō's story:

> From the very beginning, there had been little sign of life in the big house. It had increasingly taken on the appearance of some deserted temple, a ruin where every sound rang ominously. Scant effort was expended to maintain the place. Rooms not in use were closed off, and the shutters were fastened tight for days on end. It was like an empty villa where Prince Genji's love, Yūgao, had died of fright.[35]

The emptiness of the place described is intensified by its vastness. It is compared to a ruined temple echoing every step and movement. The place also reverberates with literary allusions as it is juxtaposed with Yūgao's "empty villa". By means of this reference the themes of romantic love and death are introduced, both of them later developed in the

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[33] Comp. Sei Shōnagon, *Makura no sōshi — Shimpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, vol. 18, ed. Matsuo Satoshi / Nagai Kazuo, Tōkyō: Shōgakukan, 1997: 143–145.

[34] Comp.: Murasaki Shikibu, *Genji monogatari*, vol. 1 — *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 14, ed. Yamagishi Tokuhei, Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1985: 123–174.

[35] 何となく怕き處のやうに人思ひぬもとより廣き家の人氣すくなければ、いよいよ空虚として荒れ寺などの如く、掃除もさのみは行届かぬがちに、入用の無き間は雨戸を其まゝの日さへ多く、俗にくだきし河原の院も斯くやとばかり、夕がほの君ならねど、お蘭さまとて冊かるる娘の鬼にも取られで. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 312. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 182.

narrative. The literary references and associated images are thus used to create an atmosphere of desolation and to anticipate future events. They are not the main narrative technique but are indispensable in creating the setting and deepening the portrayal of the characters' emotions.

The poetic strategies are most artistically employed in *Takekurabe*, the most famous and critically acclaimed of Ichiyō's stories. The narrative opens with a vivid description of the area bordering Yoshiwara's red-light district which is the setting of the events later described. The mention of Yoshiwara not only serves aesthetic purposes but also introduces the theme of economic dependence and social determinism, both crucial for understanding the relations between the novella's characters. The poetic quality of *Takekurabe*'s opening passage is undoubtedly one of the reasons for its immense and unfading popularity:

> It's a long way round to the front of the quarter, where the trailing branches of the willow tree bid farewell to the revellers and the bawdyhouse lights flicker in the moat, dark as the dye that blackens the teeth of the Yoshiwara beauties. From the third-floor rooms of the lofty houses the all but palpable music and laughter spill down into the side street. Who knows how these great establishments prosper? The rickshaws pull up night and day.[36]

The passage brilliantly uses the associative possibilities of *engo* and *kakekotoba*. The willow tree is attributed with the expression *mikaeri* 見返り (literally "looking, turning back") and thus serves both as a symbol of the unwillingness of Yoshiwara's customers to leave the pleasure quarters in the morning and as a part of a name of the famous willow in the quarter. The image of beautiful courtesans whose teeth were customarily dyed black overlap with the image of the moat surrounding Yoshiwara, a recognizable symbol of this most famous of pleasure districts in Japan. The poetic techniques are further combined with what may be referred to as a film-like narration. The camera stops at the pitch black

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[36] 廻れば大門の見返り柳いと長けれど、お歯ぐろ溝に燈火うつる三階の騒ぎも手に取る如く、明けくれなしの車の行來にはかり知られぬ全盛をうらなひて. *Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū*, vol. 1, ed. Shioda Ryōhei / Wada Yoshie, Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1974: 402. Transl. in: Robert L. Danly, *In the shade of spring leaves: The life and writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, a woman of letters in Meiji Japan*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981: 254.

moat and then moves up to the third floor lightened up and lively with voices and music. The stillness and darkness of the moat is thus juxtaposed with the rooms of the quarter revealed to the readers due to this vertical movement of the camera.

6. Conclusion

Yamizakura, *Yamiyo* and *Takekurabe* are associated with different stages of Higuchi Ichiyō's literary career. They all prove, however, that poetic techniques and imagery were effectively used in both her earliest works and in her most mature ones. Moreover, a closer reading of these texts also exposes a significant shift in the manner Ichiyō explored and applied poetic tradition in her narratives. Her earlier stories, such as *Yamizakura*, resemble a poetic sketch created around a central theme or motif, most frequently *osananajimi* or childhood love. Later stories, like *Yamiyo* or *Takekurabe*, have a more complex narrative structure and more rounded characters. As Ichiyō gradually develops the narrative techniques typical for novellas, such as dialogues – the mastery of which is demonstrated in her other mature work, *Wakaremichi* わかれ道 ("Separate ways", 1896) – and complex character construction, the role of *engo* and *kakekotoba* is reduced to descriptive passages giving them their superbly lyrical and allusive quality.